



Stanislaus County Office of Education: *Project Cal-Well Journey*

Project Cal-Well is a program that aims to expand mental health services in schools and communities. The California Department of Education initiated the program in 2014 and has led its implementation ever since. It was funded by the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA) through their "Now Is The Time" - Advancing Wellness and Resiliency in Education (NITT-AWARE) grant program. In Cohort 2 (2019–24), the California Department of Education partnered with districts across five Northern California counties, including Stanislaus County.

Stanislaus County Office of Education Overview

Stanislaus County Office of Education (SCOE) plays a vital role in supporting the educational and mental health needs of the diverse student population enrolled in the county's 25 school districts. In collaboration with Project Cal-Well, SCOE partnered with three school districts to enhance their school-based mental health programs: Hughson Unified, Patterson, and Turlock. These three districts serve approximately 22,000 students. Most (65%) students are Hispanic or Latine, while 24 percent are White, 5 percent are Asian, 1 percent are two or more races, and 3 percent are African American. Most students (65%) are socioeconomically disadvantaged, and 28 percent are English Learners.¹

Hughson USD

- Billy Joe Dickens Continuation (Alt Ed)
- Hughson High School
- Emilie J. Ross Middle School

Patterson USD

- Creekside Middle School
- Del Puerto High School (Alt Ed)
- Patterson High School

Turlock USD

- Dutcher Middle School
- eCademy Charter at Crane (Alt Ed)
- Pitman High School
- Roselawn Continuation High School
- Turlock Junior High School
- Turlock High School

¹ California School Dashboard. (n.d.). District performance overview. California Department of Education. Retrieved April 5, 2024, from **Turlock USD**: <https://www.caschooldashboard.org/reports/5075739000000/2023>, **Patterson USD**: <https://www.caschooldashboard.org/reports/50712170000000/2023>, and **Hughson USD**: <https://dq.cde.ca.gov/dataquest/dqcensus/EnrEthGrd.aspx?cde=5075549&aggllevel=district&year=2022-23>

Project Cal-Well Areas of Focus

SCOE and their partnering districts have focused on the following activities across the three main components of the Project Cal-Well model.

Component 1: Provide Universal Support to Create Positive School Climates That Help Students Develop Social–Emotional Skills, Promote Resilience, and Increase School Safety (Tier 1)

Mental Health Training. Through Project Cal-Well, SCOE staff conducted various training sessions for students and school staff to enhance their knowledge about strategies for preventing mental health problems and promoting mental health awareness. From fall 2019 through December 2023, Project Cal-Well trained 1,750 individuals in the mental health workforce and more than 12,000 individuals who were not in the mental health workforce.

To address the impact of stress and burnout on educators, SCOE organized the “Day of the Educator” to prioritize their mental well-being. This event offered free pampering sessions and activities like mindfulness, yoga, therapy dogs, and massage. Additionally, SCOE offered professional development on mental health and trauma literacy and workshops on the impact of trauma and stress on those working in education.

Creation of Wellness Spaces. Project Cal-Well supported the establishment of six wellness spaces in the three participating districts, including the well-received “Bear Cave” at Ross Middle School in Hughson Unified. Notably, these spaces were developed with direct input from students, ensuring the physical environment aligned with their preferences. The emphasis on student feedback underscores Project Cal-Well’s commitment to tailoring mental health initiatives to the unique

needs and expectations of the students served. By incorporating student perspectives, these wellness spaces serve as inviting and supportive environments, fostering community and well-being.

Universal Mental Health Screening. SCOE worked closely with the participating districts to implement a universal mental health screening system. Despite initial hurdles related to implementation during the COVID-19 pandemic and screener selection, each Project Cal-Well district in Stanislaus County now utilizes a mental health screener, such as the [Covitality screening tool](#). These ongoing efforts have yielded valuable lessons that have been shared with other districts across the county.

National Alliance on Mental Illness (NAMI) On Campus Clubs. NAMI On Campus Clubs significantly expanded mental health advocacy across the county. A dedicated youth coordinator, funded by a concurrent grant from Stanislaus County Behavioral Health and Recovery Services through the Mental Health Services Oversight and Accountability Commission Innovation Grant, grew the initiative. From just a couple of campuses, the initiative grew to 20 high schools, 6 middle schools, and 1 university club, with a focus on middle schools in Project Cal-Well districts. The SCOE NAMI On Campus network has more than 500 mental health champions, including students and advisors, actively engaging in advocacy, awareness campaigns, and community events.



Through end-of-year surveys, NAMI On Campus Club participants reported that they were confident their clubs were making a difference on their school campuses and that club participation impacted them personally. Table 1 provides details about student responses to the end-of-year survey.

Table 1. NAMI End-of-Year Survey Results

I feel confident that our club ... (n = 40)	Strongly Agree/Agree
can influence how teens feel about mental health.	96%
raises awareness of mental health in our school.	100%
helps students at our school talk more openly about mental health.	95%
helps students know where to go for help if they are experiencing mental health concerns.	93%

After being in this club ... (n =33–39)	Strongly Agree/Agree
I gained skills that can help me in the future.	92%
I feel like I can talk more openly about mental health with my peers.	94%
I feel like I have an adult at school who I can talk to about my problems.	92%
I am more interested in pursuing a career in health care or mental health.	72%

“ *I think we have definitely let our school know that it is okay to struggle and that it is okay to ask for help. I think the club has really pushed out awareness this year for both students and staff.”*

—NAMI On Campus Club participant

Component 2: Increase Availability of and Access to School-Based Mental Health Services (Tier 2)

Mental Health and Behavioral Referral Pathways.

SCOE has been supporting the development of referral pathways to increase student access to effective behavioral and mental health supports and services. For example, Hughson High developed an online request for assistance form accessible through the school’s website, enabling students,

parents, and school personnel to initiate referrals conveniently. At each site, the district has designated individuals who review requests for assistance and determine appropriate channels for where they need to be sent for support. Moreover, referrals are also discussed in Tier 2 team meetings to assess additional student needs and close any service gaps.

SCOE established a learning community of practice centered around mental and behavioral health referral pathways. Fourteen of the 26 districts participated and expressed an interest in continuing these sessions with SCOE because they found them valuable for learning and establishing connections with other participating districts.

Component 3: Build Partnerships and Cross-System Collaborations to Promote Youth Well-Being and Improve Access to Mental Health Services

Community Partnerships. Through Project Cal-Well, Stanislaus County Project Cal-Well districts created or renewed numerous community partnerships to improve the delivery of school-based health services and programs. The Mental Health Student Services Act Grant has facilitated opportunities for professional development and engagement activities throughout the county.

Additionally, the California Department of Education’s (CDE) Project Cal-STOP has helped develop the Sandy Hook Promise’s [Start With Hello](#) and [Say Something](#) programs at Turlock USD. Both programs are aimed at improving student connectedness and school safety.

SCOE has also received resources for Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports (PBIS) work from the Mental Health Services Oversight and Accountability Commission’s (MHSOAC) Innovation Grant—awarded to SCOE by the Stanislaus County Behavioral Health and Recovery Services—and the Learning Communities School Success Program (LCSSP) grant from the California Department of Education.

Sustainability and Growth

Through strategic alignment and resource utilization, SCOE has set the foundation for ongoing mental health support in Stanislaus County schools beyond the Project Cal-Well initiative. SCOE has been working with its districts to help them achieve a stage where they can implement a multipayer fee schedule, ensuring the sustainability of their programs beyond the initial infusion of one-time funds. Additionally, SCOE is working in partnership with existing initiatives such as the Children and Youth Behavioral Health Initiative and the Student Behavioral Health Incentive Program to expand its capacity to support school mental health initiatives throughout the county. By integrating these initiatives, including the upcoming round of Project Cal-Well, SCOE will continue to further enhance its ability to support school mental health initiatives across the county.

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